



BRILL

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL  
OF THE PLATONIC TRADITION 8 (2014) 192-230

The International  
Journal of the  
Platonic Tradition  
[brill.com/jpt](http://brill.com/jpt)

# *Non enim ab hiis que sensus est iudicare sensum.* Sensation and Thought in *Theaetetus*, Plotinus and Proclus

D. Gregory MacIsaac

Carleton University, Ottawa

[gregory.macisaac@carleton.ca](mailto:gregory.macisaac@carleton.ca)

## Abstract

I examine the relation between sensation and discursive thought (*dianoia*) in Plato, Plotinus, and Proclus. In *Theaetetus*, a soul whose highest faculty was sensation would have no unified experience of the sensible world, lacking universal ideas to give order to the sensible flux. It is implied that such universals are grasped by the soul's thinking. In Plotinus the soul is not passive when it senses the world, but as the *logos* of all things it thinks the world through its own forms.

Proclus argues against the derivation of universal *logoi* from the senses, which alone can't make the sensible world comprehensible. At most they give a record of the original sense-impression in its particularity. The soul's own projected *logoi* give the sensible world stability. For Proclus, bare sensation does not depend on thought, but a unified experience of the sense-world depends on its paradigmatic *logoi* in our souls.

## Keywords

Greek Philosophy – Plato – *Theaetetus* – Sensation – *Dianoia* – Discursive Reason – Plotinus – Proclus – Neoplatonism

\* Proclus, *De Prov.* 44.17 = Isaac Comnenos, *Peri pronoiās kai phusikēs anagkēs*, 44.58-67 (p. 150 Budé): *ou gar apo tôn tēs aisthēseōs esti krinein tēn aisthēsin*.

\*\* This paper was originally intended for *Plotinus 204/205-2005: Proceedings of the International Colloquium Plotinus*, to be published by the University of Bucharest Press. Unfortunately, this volume did not appear. I wish to thank the editors of *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* for publishing it here.

In this paper I will examine the relation between sensation and discursive reason (*dianoia*) in Neoplatonism. I will begin with a brief examination of sensation in Plato's *Theaetetus*. After this, I will argue that in Plotinus and Proclus, our experience of the sensible world has unity and coherence because when we sense the world we are also thinking it through its paradigmatic forms.

## 1

In Plato's *Theaetetus*, the first definition of knowledge proposed is that "knowledge (*epistêmê*) is nothing other than sensation."<sup>1</sup> Socrates immediately says that this definition is the equivalent of the *dictum* of Protagoras, that "man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not."<sup>2</sup> Socrates and Theaetetus engage in a discussion of this definition, in which they first draw out its implications, and then examine it critically.<sup>3</sup> In the end, they reject the definition, because the ontology which it implies does away with any stable being, indeed even with sensation itself.<sup>4</sup>

At the beginning of their investigation they agree that sensation is infallible.<sup>5</sup> It was generally agreed by the ancients that knowledge cannot be in error. The infallibility of the senses consists in the immediate and undeniable presence of the sensation. My eyes may not tell me what the object, understood as whatever is the source of the sensation, looks like to someone else, or for that matter what it looks like when no one is looking at it. But they do immediately and infallibly tell me what the object looks like to me. So if knowledge is something which is infallible, and I cannot be in error about my own immediate sense-experience, then it is plausible to think that sensation is a good candidate for knowledge.<sup>6</sup>

In *Theaetetus*, knowledge is considered not only to be infallible, but to have as its object what is and what is not.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, if sensation really is knowledge, each man can immediately and infallibly know what is and is not for him.

---

1 *Theaet.*151e.

2 *Theaet.*152a., trans. M.J. Levett, rev. Myles F. Burnyeat, in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997) p. 169.

3 *Theaet.*151e-160d, and 163a-183c respectively.

4 *Theaet.*182e.

5 *Theaet.*152c.

6 *Theaet.*160c-d.

7 *Theaet.*152c.

If I sense cold, then cold *is* for me, and if I do not sense cold, then cold *is not* for me. This is why Socrates brings in Protagoras, because it is clear that according to this definition, “man is the measure of all things: of the things which are, that they are, and of the things which are not, that they are not.”

But if man is the measure of all things, then not only do the objects which the senses report have fixed qualities in reference to sensing subjects, they cannot have any such qualities in themselves. Everything must come to be something only in reference to a particular sensing subject. Imagine that one man touches the water in a basin and finds it warm, and then another man touches it and finds it cold. If the warm or the cold existed in the water itself, then we would have one of two untenable consequences. The water which is itself warm might have itself become cold, without undergoing any change except being touched by another man.<sup>8</sup> But this would be absurd; the water would have changed without having changed.<sup>9</sup> Failing that, the water might remain warm. But then the second man, for whom the water is cold, would have a sensation that is in error. In that case, sensation could not be knowledge, because knowledge cannot be in error. Socrates marshals a similar argument to show that sensible qualities cannot exist in the subject either, and must come to be when the subject meets the object.

Socrates' aim in these arguments is first to show that a sort of Heraclitean flux is a necessary consequence of the Protagorean doctrine that sensation is knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Once he has established that, he then examines this Heraclitean ontology, showing that if one takes it seriously and consistently, it refutes the initial Protagorean thesis. His general strategy is to show that someone who assumes that sensation is an authoritative access to the truth about being has also to assume that being conforms to the radically fleeting character of sensation. A being that had any kind of stable identity independent of our sensory encounter with it could falsify our sensations, and hence falsify our initial thesis. This is why Socrates hypothesises that, on this account, the world is made up only of quick and slow motions, and that sensation comes about by the meeting of these two sorts of motion, neither of which exists without the other. The word ‘motion’ is used here, because there is nothing which *is*, only things which *come to be* for each other. So the stone is a motion which *comes to be seen*, and my eye is a motion which *comes to see*. And it is only when these two motions come together that rock and eye exist. Before this congress of

---

8 *Theaet.*154a-b.

9 All that has changed in this instance is which man is touching the water.

10 *Theaet.*152d-154b.

motions there was neither eye, as 'that which is seeing', nor rock, as 'that which is seen'.<sup>11</sup>

All things must be in motion, because standing still means having a character in itself, which would then undermine the authority of sensation. So the rock is not a rock before I see it, and it ceases to be a rock when I cease to see it. Socrates remarks, humourously, that we will have to re-engineer language in order to describe things accurately, discarding any words which make things stand still, such as the verb 'to be', or substantives like 'man' or 'stone'.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, the argument shows that all things must change in all ways, on the Protagorean account. Intersubjective perception of qualities is impossible, lest one subject be mistaken; and each quality can occur precisely once, to rule out the possibility that a subject fail to recognise it when it recurs a second time.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, Socrates shows that sensation itself must be in complete flux as well.<sup>14</sup> If this were not the case, a subject might be mistaken about the kind of perception which he is currently experiencing, seeing rather than not seeing, for example. But if sensation is also the sort of thing that exists only once, for one person, and immediately passes over into not-sensation, the thesis that sensation is knowledge is just as true as 'not-sensation is knowledge'. In short, as Socrates says, "if all things are in motion, every answer is equally correct, no matter what question one might be answering."<sup>15</sup>

This is a very interesting argument on Plato's part. It is interesting, not only for the simple conclusion that sensation is not knowledge, but for the implication that something more than sensation is needed in the soul even for our basic experience of the sensible world. Plato is not simply examining sensation as a faculty alongside other psychic faculties. In the argument, knowledge is assumed to be the best possible grasp of things, because it grasps what is and what is not.<sup>16</sup> So the thesis that sensation is knowledge requires an examina-

11 *Theaet.*156aff.

12 *Theaet.*157b.

13 *Theaet.*159e-160d.

14 *Theaet.*182c-e.

15 *Theaet.*183a.

16 The position of Protagoras presented in *Theaetetus* is both epistemological and ontological. Saying that what appears to a man is knowledge of being for that man rules out the possibility that there is a sort of being that is independent of any man's perceptions. If such an independent being existed, then what appears to men would not be knowledge so much as only one kind of knowledge. 'Knowledge' would then designate both the grasp of the being that appears to a man, and the grasp of the being that is independent of appearance. But then Protagoras' preference of subjectivity would be arbitrary, and would be a much less bold thesis than it initially seems to be. That Plato intends to rule out a

tion of a world and a soul in which sensation is the highest power.<sup>17</sup> And for such a soul in such a world, things would only exist when it sensed them, and it as a sensing subject would only exist when engaged in sensation.<sup>18</sup> Even more strongly, it would be going too far even to say that such a soul is a subject, or has senses, because at each moment it and what it grasps would be completely other than what they were a moment before. Such an absolute flux might exist, but it wouldn't *be* anything, and it wouldn't be possible to say anything about it. More importantly, this is not what our experience of the sensible world is in fact like.

So the implication of Plato's argument is not simply that sensation is not knowledge and that the sensible world cannot be a complete flux. Its implication is that the material world must have some kind of stability that allows our experience of it to be coherent, despite the fleeting character of our sensations, and so that there must be a higher cognitive power in the soul that grasps whatever it is that remains stable in it. The thesis of a Heraclitean flux was put forward to save the truth of appearances; only in a world which is nothing more than ever-changing appearances can appearance never be falsified. But if sensation is not knowledge, then the appearances it gives me do not tell me how the world *is*. So the 'infallibility' of sensation boils down to the simple statement that how the world appears to me is how the world appears to me. Further, the most that sensation can yield is this appearance. So through my senses the object appears hot, or sweet, or conversely cold, or sour. But whether or not these things *are* is not reported by the senses. Socrates states this at the very end of his analysis of sensation, when he points out that it is the soul which makes judgements about the being or non-being, likeness or unlikeness, unity or multiplicity of sensible objects.

The hardness of something hard will be sensed through touch, as will the softness of something soft... but their being (*ousia*), and the fact that

---

purely epistemological interpretation of Protagoras is indicated by the strikingly similar discussion at the beginning of *Cratylus*, 386c-e: "if wisdom exists, and foolishness likewise, then Protagoras cannot be telling the truth. After all, if what each person believes to be true *is* true for him, no one can truly be wiser than anyone else... [But] if it isn't the case that... each thing exists privately for each person, then it is clear that things have some fixed being (*ousian*) of their own. They are not in relation to us and are not made to fluctuate by how they appear to us. They are by themselves, in relation to their own being (*ousian*), which is theirs by nature."

17 Of course, the next stage in the argument is to examine the thesis that opinion is knowledge.

18 In this model imagination (*phantasia*) is not yet posited as a sensory memory.

they *both* are, and their opposition to each other, and indeed the being of this opposition the soul itself attempts to discern for us, when it reflects upon them and compares them.<sup>19</sup>

It is the soul itself, and not any one of its senses, which discerns “what is common to all things” (*to t’epi pasi koinon*), such as being, not-being, odd or even, etc.<sup>20</sup>

Plato’s remarks at this point in the *Theaetetus* are relatively brief, and I do not want to make any extensive claims here about Plato’s philosophy. I simply want to point out that it is probably these judgements made by the soul about the being or not being, likeness or unlikeness, unity or multiplicity of things which give stability to our experience of the sensible world and let it *be* rather than simply *become*. The argument runs in both ways: if our highest grasp of the world is a sensation that reveals a Heraclitean flux, then nothing can *be*. But if things *are*, the world is not a Heraclitean flux and there must be a superior grasp of it than sensation. Socrates says that it is the soul, not the senses, which grasps the being of things, implying that our experience of the sensible world as containing stable beings is due to the soul, not to the senses. It is the soul which allows us to experience a world in which there are stones and red things, which we know remain what they are even when we close our eyes. In short, it is the soul which grasps what is “common to all things” (*to t’epi pasi koinon*), and which allows us to experience under a universal aspect a world which the senses report to us as absolutely particular.

In the later Platonic tradition, although the sensible world lacks the stability and precision of being, it is not a pure becoming. It has imminent forms which prevent it from being simply nothing. But these forms are of the lowest sort, and give to material things only the stability which is found in becoming. The question which I want to focus on in this study is not the character of matter, and the forms in matter, but the relation which sensation’s grasp of its object has to the higher powers of the soul, as this is developed in Plotinus and Proclus. I have examined the *Theaetetus* as a sort of introduction to their Neoplatonic treatment of sensation, because I think this treatment stays within the problematic sketched by Plato.

19 *Theaet.*186b. It does not matter for the argument whether *ousia* refers to the being of the objects themselves which are hard and soft, or to the being of the hard and the soft in the objects. In neither case is their being sensed.

20 *Theaet.*185c.

Much of the scholarship on sensation in Plotinus has focused on its mechanics.<sup>21</sup> But I think Plotinus and Proclus were more interested in how sensation relates to discursive reason (*dianoia*) than they were in sensation itself. What we find in both thinkers is an investigation which travels in the direction only hinted at in *Theaetetus*. What sort of activity does the soul engage in when it experiences the sensible world, in addition to the passive affection of the senses? I will suggest that, for both Plotinus and Proclus, upon the occasion of sense-experience the soul calls up its own innate knowledge of the forms. What this means is that for these two Neoplatonists, when we go around sensing the world we are also thinking it. Indeed, if we weren't also thinking it we couldn't have the stable experience of the sensible world that we in fact do have.

## 2

There are a number of places where Plotinus discusses sensation,<sup>22</sup> but for the present purpose we will examine IV.4.23, and IV.6.1-3. The outline of his theory is simple. In order to sense an object, the soul engages in an activity concerning some sort of affection in one of the body's sense organs.

In IV.4.23, Plotinus argues that sense-organs are needed for sensation. The soul by itself will not apprehend the sense-object, because by itself it is thought alone (*monon noêsis*). If it is to apprehend something else, it needs to take possession of it either by becoming like the object or by being together with what has become like it (*êtoi homoiôtheisan ê tôi homoiôthenti sunousan*), and it cannot do this by itself.<sup>23</sup> It cannot do this because the soul is immaterial, and what it grasps through sensation is bodily. "There cannot, then, be nothing but these two things, the external object and the soul: since then the soul would not be affected; but there must be a third thing which will be affected, and this is that which will receive the form."<sup>24</sup> This third thing is the sense-organ, which shares the nature of both body and of soul. The sense-organ is a body, and so

21 See, for example, H.J. Blumenthal (1971) 67-79; E.K. Emilsson (1988). Very useful is K. Corrigan (1981) 98-126. There has been almost no examination of sensation in Proclus. See H.J. Blumenthal (1982) 1-11; H.J. Blumenthal (1989) 257-280; and H.J. Blumenthal (1999) 319-335. A good discussion of the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian tradition on sensation is to be found in H.J. Blumenthal (1996) 121-135.

22 See, for example, *Enn.*I.1.1-7; III.6.1-5; IV.3.3; IV.3.26.5-6; IV.4.23; IV.5.4; IV.6.1-3; VI.4.6.

23 *Enn.*IV.4.23.5-9. Armstrong uses the term 'assimilate' for the forms of *homoioô*.

24 *Enn.*IV.4.23.19-22. See also *Enn.*IV.5.1.

is able to be affected passively by colours, sounds, etc. in a way that the soul cannot. But the sense-organ is a particular sort of body, in that its affections become form (*to pathos autou eidos genesthai*).<sup>25</sup> It is likely that the reason why a sense-organ can do this has to do with what distinguishes a sense-organ from other sorts of bodies, namely the presence of soul. Only living beings have senses, and so soul is present to the eye and the ear, allowing them to carry out their operations, in a way that it is not present to the sense-object.<sup>26</sup>

Plotinus' use of the *sympatheia* which exists in the cosmos to replace a medium of sensation has to do with how the sense-object affects the sense

---

25 *Enn.* IV.4.23.33.

26 Obviously the necessary qualifications must be in place. When I see my friend, soul is present in the sense-object. But that is not the soul involved in the operation of my power of sensation.

See also E.K. Emilsson (1988) 63-93. Emilsson distinguishes between sensation as a 'mere' bodily change in a sense-organ, and the sense-organ's taking on, for example, the colours in our visual field as immaterial forms. He attributes the former position to Blumenthal, but thinks it is not tenable. If sensations were merely the soul's observations of physical changes in sense-organs, then the locus of sensation would not be outside the subject, in the manner in which Plotinus says it is. Admittedly, Blumenthal's treatment of this aspect of sensation in H.J. Blumenthal (1971) 67-79, is brief, but I don't think it is far off the mark, and I don't think it really differs from Emilsson's position.

It is safe to say that, since Aristotle, the Greeks conceived of a sense-organ as a body which undergoes a certain change when presented with the proper sort of sense-object. Is this change a bodily change? Certainly, because it is a change in a body, in the same way that going from hot to cold is a bodily change for a stone. Is it merely a bodily change? Not if by 'merely' one means something involving only matter. But there is no such thing as a 'mere' bodily change, because all change is of a matter taking on a new form.

An eye differs from a stone precisely in that, when presented with the colour red a few feet away, the eye undergoes a change and the stone does not. This change is bodily, because the eye is a body, and is taking on a form, because all change is from one form to another form. Moreover, what allows the eye to take on this form is the fact that it is ensouled. So the organ is an intermediate, because its affection transmits to the soul the form which it takes on.

Sensation is about what is 'out there'. It is not internal in the way Emilsson supposes it must be if sensation is a 'mere' bodily change, because the form which the sense-organ passes on *began* from the sense-object, i.e. it is the form *of* the sense object. When presented with a different sense-object, the organ will pass on a different form, and so through the senses the soul is directed to what is outside. It is tempting to think of sensation as a sort of reverse of the case of the craftsman putting the form which he possesses in his Art into the matter which he works on (v.8.1). In that case, too, there is the same form which exists both in the soul and in matter.



organ, and so is not our present topic.<sup>27</sup> Once affected, what the sense-organ delivers to the soul is a form. This 'delivery', however, is not a passive affection of the soul. Instead, Plotinus thinks that the soul engages in an activity which is about the form received by the sense-organ. Plotinus gives a detailed discussion of this, in the context of his treatment of sensation and memory, in IV.6.

He begins by denying that memory is an impression or seal-stamp on the soul, because sensation is not like this. He says that, in the case of sight, when we see something the soul looks outwards: "we look there (*ekei*) where it is and direct our gaze where the visible object is . . . obviously it is there (*ekei*) that the apprehension takes place (*ginomenês*) and the soul looks outwards."<sup>28</sup> If sensation were like a seal-stamp, there would be no need for the soul to look outwards, because it would contain the form of the visible object in it.<sup>29</sup>

Instead of sensation being a passive affection, Plotinus says that it is a matter of power (*dunamis*), and that the soul has activities (*energeiai*) concerning

---

27 See *Enn.* IV.5.

28 *Enn.* IV.6.1.16-19.

29 *Enn.* IV.6.1.21-24. This passage seems to suggest that apprehension (*antilêpsis*) takes place outside of the composite of the living being. So E.K. Emilsson (1988) 79: "Plotinus asserts in IV.6.1, 16-17 that the apprehension of the object in vision takes place out there where the object is. It is not quite clear how literally we are supposed to understand this statement. But in any event this is in line with the conclusion we arrived at in the previous chapter, that Plotinus conceives of vision as a direct apprehension of the quality of a distant object, though he does not say explicitly in IV.5 that the apprehension takes place there where the object is. Now, it is evident that the affection, understood as a physical change in the eye, does not as such provide any explanation of vision's capacity to apprehend a distant object."

I think it is plausible to translate *ginomenês* here as 'is born' or 'comes to be', so that Plotinus says apprehension *begins* out there. But even if we translate it as 'takes place' (Armstrong) we can avoid the spectre of the actual sensory apprehension itself taking place out where the object is. The key is the phrase 'the soul looks outwards' (*pros ta exô tês psuchês blepousês*). Plotinus is intent on preserving the outward directedness of sensation, and a theory in which the soul received an impression would destroy this. I think you have to understand the term 'impression' (*tupos*) in a very literal and physical sense here, as if the sense object 'pushed' something onto the eye, which in turn pushed onto the soul, just like a seal-ring, and so made an impression. In such a case, all the soul would possess is this impression, like the wax seal on a letter once the ring is taken away, and sensation would be of something inside the soul. This would also present problems for memory, as he discusses in IV.6.3., because such an impression wouldn't be like our actual experience of remembering things. It would simply be there, as clearly now as when I first received it. Instead, the soul has to look outwards, through the organ, towards the object in order to sense it.

what approaches it, the objects of sense.<sup>30</sup> Note that sensation here is distinct from the affection in the sense-organ. He admits that there is affection involved in sensation, especially with taste and smell. But the actual sensations of these are judgements (*kriséis*) and acts of knowledge (*gnôseis*) of these affections: “And where taste and smell are concerned there are some affections (*pathê*), but [the affections] which are perceptions of them [i.e. of the objects of taste and smell] are also judgements concerning the affections, and are acts of knowledge distinct from the affections.”<sup>31</sup> He has an astonishing description of hearing: “the impression is in the air, and is a sort of articulated stroke, like letters written on the air by the maker of the sound; but the power and the substance of the soul does something like reading the impressions written on the air when they come near and reach the point at which they can be seen.”<sup>32</sup> I will argue below that the analogy with reading has important implications. Here it is sufficient to see that the soul is not accepting anything from outside, in this analogy, but rather itself being active when it is presented with the impressions which remain outside of it.

He compares this knowing activity to the knowledge which the soul has of intelligibles (*noêtôn*), saying that this latter “is much freer from affections and impressions; sense-objects are observed from outside, but the intelligibles in reverse come out, one can say, from within.”<sup>33</sup> What is important here is not the difference between knowledge of intelligibles and of sensibles, but rather the fact that Plotinus describes them as less and more pure examples of the same thing, of knowing activity: “and they [knowledge of intelligibles] are activities in a higher degree and more authentically.”<sup>34</sup> The sensibles are outside the soul, the intelligibles inside (and before the soul, in fact), but concerning both the soul has an *energeia* which is knowledge.

In the next chapter, Plotinus develops the analogy between knowledge of sensibles and intelligibles even further. How can the soul know sensible objects when it doesn't actually receive anything? The soul “is the rational principle (*logos*) of all things, and the nature of soul is the last and lowest rational principle of the intelligibles and the beings in the intelligible world, but first of those in the whole world perceived by the senses.”<sup>35</sup> The soul knows the intelligibles by being them in a certain way. He denies that the intelligibles

---

30 *Enn.* IV.6.2.1-7.

31 *Enn.* IV.6.2.16-19.

32 *Enn.* IV.6.2.11-16.

33 *Enn.* IV.6.2.19-20.

34 *Enn.* IV.6.2.21.

35 *Enn.* IV.6.3.5-7.

come to the soul from outside. Instead, “it has them in some way and sees them and is them in a rather dim way, and becomes them more clearly out of the dimness by a kind of awakening, and passes from potentiality to actuality.”<sup>36</sup> It is clear here that Plotinus is referring to the manner in which the soul is a *logos* of *Nous*, and when it is about its own activity of *dianoia* it doesn't receive anything from *Nous* because it is already itself an expression and image of the intelligibles. What is required is not a reception, but rather a self-awakening, and passing from *dunamis* to *energeia*, one could say from an unconscious to a conscious possession of its own ideas.

Plotinus continues:

In the same way (*ton auton tropon*) [the soul] makes the objects of sense which are, so to speak, connected with it, shine out (*eklampein poiei*), one might say, by its own power (*par' hautês*), and brings them before its eyes, since its power [of sense-perception] (*tês dunameôs*) is ready for them and, in a way, in travail towards them.<sup>37</sup>

By this analogy, the activity which the soul exercises with regard to sense-objects is also a passing from *dunamis* to *energeia*. It makes the sense-object ‘shine out’. However, the sense-object was not received into the soul. So for the same reason that the object cannot exercise some activity on a passive soul, this activity which the soul is exercising cannot be on the sense-object itself. It has to be its own self-actualisation, just as in the case with knowing the intelligibles. And the sense-object ‘shines out’, not because the soul makes the object light up, but because it lights itself up in its attention to the object. And it does this through its *energeia* which is a judgement and an act of knowledge about the sense-object.<sup>38</sup> We should remember the analogy with reading.<sup>39</sup> A soul

36 *Enn.* IV.6.3.13-16.

37 *Enn.* IV.6.3.16-19. Plotinus uses *hoion* three times in this short passage, rendered by Armstrong as: “so to speak”, “one might say”, “in a way.” This indicates that Plotinus was aware of how contrary to everyday expectations is this active theory of sense-perception. Proclus says explicitly, at *In Parm.* 894.19-23, that it is counterintuitive to think that the soul itself produces the form through which it understands sensible things, even though it is true: “It [the general idea by which we comprehend the many particulars] must therefore take its origin from somewhere else, and receive from some other source this power of comprehending each form. Of this source, indeed, it is an image, coming into existence in a way contrary to what one would expect (*para doxan*), by virtue of reminiscence, on the basis of sense-objects, of the causal principle aroused within us.”

38 *Enn.* IV.6.2.16-19.

39 *Enn.* IV.6.2.10-16.

which is reading already possesses the form of each letter, and reads not by taking in the shapes all over again, but rather by calling up its own understanding of each letter when it is presented with them in front of it. In the same way, the soul must already possess in itself the forms of the sensibles, which it calls up when it observes the form which has come to be in the sense-organ. This is what he must mean by saying that the soul is the first *logos* of the whole sensible world.

The rest of the chapter discusses memory, and confirms this interpretation. Both memory and perception are a kind of strength.<sup>40</sup> We remember things more or less easily at different times. In other words, we can strengthen our memories, in general, or with regard to particular things. And this can only be the case if memory is a sort of power, like thinking, which can be actualised to a greater or lesser extent. Plotinus doesn't say explicitly here that memory is a calling up of forms which the soul already possesses, but what else could he mean?<sup>41</sup>

So it is plausible to think that what we find in Plotinus is a general account of sensation in which the soul actualises the forms which it already has in itself. It is the *logos* of all things, and lights itself up when presented with affections in the sense-organs. If we remember that the hypostasis of Soul also made body, we will realise that according to Plotinus, the soul is thinking the sensible world through the *logoi* which it possesses, and which are the same *logoi* which the Soul used to make the sensible world. So the soul is thinking the particulars through the universals which are their paradigms when it experiences the sensible world. The soul is primarily something which thinks, even if it makes use

40 *Enn.* IV.6.3.55.

41 See the discussion of forms in perception, in E.K. Emilsson (1988) 126-140. Emilsson comes to the same conclusion, although he seems to think it is a bit surprising. It seems to me, however, that Plotinus could only hold a theory like this, otherwise, as he implies at IV.6.2.9, the power of the soul would be mastered by its object, instead of mastering it. To put it another way, insofar as perception involves consciousness of forms, those forms will have to be psychic, and psychic forms do not come from the lower forms which organise matter. See the excellent discussion in K. Corrigan (1981) 98-126, see especially p. 118: "As demiurgic soul we *create* the object; as perceptive soul we give it *logos* or simply qualify it further (cf. III.3.4.37-40). Thus, the birth pangs experienced before the objects of sense (IV.6.3) cease when one comes to *Nous* 'and not before' (V.9.2.9-10). Plotinus' use of metaphor is often philosophically precise. In a real sense, therefore, it is 'ourselves' who generate not only *substrata* (to the degree that they are *formed*) but also universals, quality and quantity (cf. VI.6.16,50-54; II.6.3; VI.2.21,11-59)."

of a body which has sense organs.<sup>42</sup> This account which it is plausible to find in Plotinus is explicit in Proclus.

If we look back to our analysis of *Theaetetus*, we can see that Plotinus has addressed the relation between sensation and thinking in a manner different than Plato has, but has come to a strikingly similar conclusion. In Plato's text, a soul whose highest power was sensation led to the untenable thesis of Heraclitean flux. This implied that sensation itself cannot judge "what is common to all things" (*to t'epi pasi koinon*), such as being, not-being, odd or even, etc.<sup>43</sup> Rather, it is the soul that must make judgements about these things. Plotinus, for his part, is concerned to deny that the passivity of the sense-organ is shared by the soul itself. Although they have different reasons, both thinkers describe the soul's own activity as a judgement about sensible objects, distinct from the affection of the sense-organs.<sup>44</sup> Both distinguish between the affection of the sense organ, and a knowledge of universals concerning those affections. In Plato the 'universal' is *to t'epi pasi koinon* and in Plotinus it is likely the soul's own *logoi*, and these are obviously not exactly the same. But if we make allowances for the developments of six centuries which lie between them, it is striking how similar their accounts of the soul's relation to sensible objects are. What is even more striking is that the arguments which yield these similar accounts are so different.

### 3

What we find in Proclus, in a way, is a meeting of these two arguments, which produces the fullest of the three accounts of the soul's thinking activity about sense-objects.<sup>45</sup> In Proclus the sensible world is not a pure Heraclitean flux, but the forms which structure the sensible world are of a lower order than the *logoi* through which the soul thinks it. So, as in Plato, sensation itself does not allow the soul to grasp the being of sensibles. Further, this deficiency of the

42 It seems that the emphasis of a statement like, "it is clear that sense-perception belongs to the soul in the body (*psuchês en sômati*) and working through the body (*dia sômatos*)" (*Enn.*IV.4.23.49-50), is on the instrumentality of body. Sensation is an activity which the soul carries on, and it does this *through* its body.

43 *Theaet.*185c.

44 Plato uses *krinein* (*Theaet.*186b) and Plotinus uses *kriseis* (*Enn.*VI.2.18) to describe the soul's activity concerning sensibles as judgements distinct from the organs' affections.

45 I have examined elsewhere the higher powers in Proclus' account of the soul. For the context of his treatment of sensation, the most relevant articles are: D.G. MacIsaac (2011), D.G. MacIsaac (2010), and D.G. MacIsaac (2014).

sensible object dictates that the soul cannot be a passive recipient of its forms. Rather, as in Plotinus, the soul has an activity concerning sensible objects. In Proclus this activity is a projection of the universal *logoi* through which the soul comprehends the changeable world of sense. In this final section, we will examine these two aspects of Proclus' account.

We will look first at two passages from Proclus' Euclid commentary and his commentary on the *Parmenides*, where he argues against those who claim that sensation can yield the *logoi* or *eidê* with which the soul thinks.<sup>46</sup> Although his intention in both of these passages is to show that sensation cannot be the source of discursive reason itself, the discussions also illuminate how the soul's grasp of the sensible object requires a sort of thinking. In the Euclid commentary, Proclus' argument is about mathematical *logoi*. However, his analysis of mathematics can be applied to the soul's discursive reasoning in general, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> He examines the two possible ways in which mathematical *logoi* might possibly be derived from sense-objects, using the technical terms abstraction (*aphairesis*) and collection (*athroisis*, *sunathroisis*).<sup>48</sup> The soul either strips away those characteristics of sense-objects which are extraneous to their underlying mathematical character, through abstraction, or it collects together the particular characters shared by many sense objects, through collection.<sup>49</sup>

Both of the options are not possible, according to Proclus, because of the character of sense-objects. Abstraction is described by Proclus as a process by which the soul looks at circles and triangles in matter, and then draws the form of circle or triangle in the soul itself. However, Proclus asks, if this were the case, where would the precision (*akribeia*) and irrefutable character (*aneleg-ton*) of mathematical *logoi* come from? These characters cannot come from sense-objects, because if they did, there would be far more precision in sense-objects than there actually is:

46 *In Eucl.*12.2-16.16; *In Parm.*891.4-898.20.

47 See D.G. MacIsaac (2001) 30ff. In my experience of the world, I see things which are 'straight' or 'double', just as I see things which are 'man' or 'stone'. Neither of these sorts of universals can be derived from sensation.

48 He refers to collection with two phrases, one used at the beginning of his discussion, one at the end. The first is a "collection of the parts into one common *logos*" (*athroisin tôn merikôn eis hena ton koinon logon*) (*In Eucl.*12.6-7), while the second is a "collecting together of what is common in each thing" (*sunathroisin tôn en tois kath' hekasta koinôn*) (*In Eucl.*15.17-18).

49 J. Trouillard (1972) 29 points out that *aphairesis* is an Aristotelian term, while *athroisis* and *sunathroisis* are likely Stoic terms.

For where among the sensibles do we find anything that is without parts, or without breadth, or without depth? Where do we see the equality of the lines from the centre to the circumference? Where the fixed ratios of the sides? Where the rightness of angles? Do we not see that all sensible things are confused with one another and that no quality in them is pure and free of its opposite, but that all are divisible and extended and changing? How, then, can we attribute a stable being (*ousian*) to unchangeable [mathematical] *logoi*, if they are derived from things that are ever changing from one state to another?<sup>50</sup>

His contention is that the theory of abstraction assumes that somehow by removing the imprecision from sense-objects the soul will be left with a stable and precise object for thought. But Proclus thinks the contrary is true. Because sense-objects are unstable through and through, it is impossible to arrive at a precise and stable object by removing certain of the characteristics of sense-objects. There would be nothing left, because the character of sense-objects is essentially to be imprecise and changeable, mixed and confused. So the theory of abstraction assumes that sense-objects actually have a two-fold nature. They have, you might say, an unstable superstructure which must be stripped away to reveal a stable and precise substructure which can serve as the object of thought. Proponents of this theory must think that there is a mathematical object hidden down there somewhere, 'underneath the surface'. This is simply contrary to the nature of sense-objects, according to Proclus. Thus, if there is to be any stability and precision in mathematical reasoning about sense objects, this stability and precision must come from somewhere else, i.e. from the soul.

We should point out that Proclus is not arguing that the sensible world is a pure Heraclitean flux, anymore than Plato was. He thinks that it is unstable and changeable, but not a pure becoming, because there are forms in sensible things. This is only to say that there are material circles and triangles, but they are not pure and unmixed with their opposites. A material circle will not have all of its points equidistant from its centre, and so will be not-circle as well as circle; a material triangle will not be made up of straight lines. But they will still be recognisable as circles and triangles, despite their deficiency, because they are images of the true geometrical figures. This should remind us of the passage in *Republic* where Socrates says that being mixed with their opposites

---

50 *In Eucl.* 12.19-13.1 (trans. Morrow, with slight changes). All translations of Proclus are mine, unless indicated otherwise.



is the character of the objects of sense.<sup>51</sup> With regard to our larger argument, his contention would be that the idea of circle through which I recognise that this material thing is somewhat circular cannot itself be derived from this material thing.

The theory of collection grants Proclus his premise that the objects of sensation are particulars, unlike abstraction which wants to find underlying universals in sense-objects. If sensation grasps only particulars, but still is to yield the universal of mathematics, then somehow mathematical reasoning proceeds from particular premises, using a particular demonstration, but yields universal conclusions. However, Proclus argues, one cannot conclude from seeing this right angle added to this other right angle that when two right angles are added the result will always be a straight line. One can only conclude that it has happened this particular time. In other words, collection tries to violate the Aristotelian rule that particular premises yield particular demonstrations of particulars.<sup>52</sup> Because mathematics deals with universals and collection yields only particulars, therefore, collection is insufficient as an explanation of mathematical *logoi*.

Both of these arguments, although about mathematics, tell us something about how Proclus regards the relation between sensation and thought. Both of them state, basically, that the most sensation can yield is something like itself, the particular, the imprecise, and that thinking requires more than this. Why sensation is limited in this manner is explained by Proclus by the hierarchical ordering of the Neoplatonic cosmos. The soul cannot receive its ideas from the body, because that would place it on a lower level than body. Proclus asks,

How, then, can we say that the soul, which is the primary partaker of *Nous* and intellectual being, and is filled with knowledge and the whole of her life from that source, is the receptacle for the murkier forms of what has the lowest seat among beings and is more imperfect in its being than all else?<sup>53</sup>

---

51 "My dear fellow, we'll say, 'of all the many beautiful things, is there one that will not also appear ugly? Or is there one of those just things that will not also appear unjust? Or one of those pious things that will not also appear impious?' There isn't one, for it is necessary that they appear to be beautiful in a way and also to be ugly in a way, and the same with the other things you asked about. What about the many doubles? Do they appear any less halves than doubles? Not one." (*Rep.*479a-b, trans. G.M.A. Grube, rev. C.D.C. Reeve).

52 *In Eucl.*14-4.

53 *In Eucl.*15.5-14. (trans. Morrow, with slight changes).



Proclus argues elsewhere that soul is the paradigm of body and body is the image of soul. If the soul, which is essentially a thinking activity, were to derive its thoughts from body, then the relation would be reversed, and soul would be a derivative image of body. But this is obviously impossible on Neoplatonic grounds.

Proclus' arguments in the *Parmenides* commentary shed more light on the status of sensation, and allow us to see that his remarks in the Euclid commentary can be taken to refer to more than mathematics. The passage of the *Parmenides* commentary which is important for us is his discussion of Socrates' third suggestion about how particulars participate in forms.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps "each of these forms is a thought (*noêma*), which cannot properly come into being anywhere but in souls."<sup>55</sup> Proclus states that by thought (*noêma*), Socrates does not mean the object of thought (*nooumenon*), but "rather the form (*eidos*) is called a thought (*noêma*) as itself the 'act of thought' thinking (*autên tèn noousan noêsîn*)."<sup>56</sup> Thought in this sense "comes to be in souls" (*en tais psuchais eggignomenon*), and so because of this, according to Proclus, *Parmenides* will show that the forms are rather the objects of thought (*nooumena*). Importantly, Proclus contrasts this thought which comes to be in souls, which he has said is itself the 'act of thought' thinking, with what is in souls essentially (*kat'ousian*).<sup>57</sup>

Proclus states next that it is this, referring to the thought which comes to be in souls, that "the Peripatetics are thinking of (*phantazomenoi*) when they go on about the 'later-born form' (*to husterogenes eidos*), which is completely different from the *logos* of the soul."<sup>58</sup> By later-born form here he means a universal derived from the many sense-objects, and posterior to them.<sup>59</sup> He continues,

54 *In Parm.* 891-898.

55 *Parmenides* 132b. (trans. Morrow/Dillon).

56 *In Parm.* 892.11-12. Morrow/Dillon has, "but rather the actual thought-process which thinks the Form is what we are calling the 'thought.'" I think this construal is mistaken because *eidos* isn't the direct object of *noousan*, but rather the accusative subject of *keklêsthai* which has *noêma* as its predicate adjective, in apposition with *autên tèn noousan noêsîn*. Why would Proclus say here that the *eidos* is the object of thought, when what is being considered is the possibility that the *eidos* is a *noêma*, and in particular the sort of *noêma* which is the act of thinking?

57 *In Parm.* 892.13-19.

58 *In Parm.* 892.20-22.

59 For a good complementary discussion of the *husterogenes logoi* see C. Helmig (2008). Helmig's treatment of Proclus is briefer than mine, and has a particular emphasis on predication rather than the mechanics of sensation, but sets the doctrine within a wider historical context. See also Helmig (2010).

I mean by psychic *logos* [the *logos*] which remains essentially (*menonta kat'ousian*) in [souls], looking towards which we say that the soul is all the forms, and the soul is the place of the forms . . . Therefore this [thing] which is later-born, and which is called a thought (*hôs noêma legomenon*), is different from the essential *logos* (*tou ousiôdous logou*), in all likelihood. For the later-born is more indistinct than the many, because it is posterior to them (*ep'autois*) and not prior to them (*pro autôn*), while the essential (*ousiôdeis*) is more perfect.<sup>60</sup>

The passage which follows is difficult to interpret because Proclus will use the term 'later-born' in two distinct ways to refer to two distinct things. First, he uses it to refer both to the manner in which a universal can be derived through experience of the common quality in sensible objects, as well as to the universal so derived. Second, he refers to the *logos* in the soul through which it can think the many sensible objects, the *logos* which Socrates said comes to be in souls, as 'later-born'. However, he will state explicitly that this second sort of 'later-born' thought is not derived from sense-objects, but from the soul itself.

His main discussion gives the impression that he is perhaps confused about the status of the later-born form, sometimes saying it is posterior to the many sense impressions, and sometimes saying that it cannot be derived from sensation. In reality, what he is doing is distinguishing two different forms that are later-born, but which are born from very different sources. The key comes at the very end of the passage in question, where Proclus states explicitly that he has four distinct levels in mind. He interprets Socrates' problems with the theory of forms as an ascent from the lowest sort of forms, found in material things, up to being itself. So we find the following.

From the things which are common in each individual (*apo tôn en tois kathekata koinôn*) he ascended to something which is different but just next to these, and this is the form in nature (*phusikon eidos*), and then next forward from this to the *logos* in soul, which is a thought of something which is (*noêmatikon tinos tôn ontôn*), and is such as we took the later-born to be (*hoion to husterogenes elambanomen*), and which does truly come to be in souls (*ho dê kai hôs alêthôs eggignetai tais psuchais*). But he must proceed from here up to the thought (*noêma*) itself of the essential *logos* (*auto . . . to tou ousiôdous logou noêma*), and from this he must make the transition to being itself (*pros auto to on*).<sup>61</sup>

60 *In Parm.*892.22-33.

61 *In Parm.*898.12-20.

So we have four levels: 1) something which is common to many sensible individuals; 2) the form in nature; 3) the *logos* which comes to be in soul and which is about some particular thing; and 4) the thoughts of the essential *logoi* themselves. He of course then adds the final destination, which is being itself. The first level is what gives rise to the later-born form which is posterior to the many, the form which the Peripatetics refer to. The third level is a different sort of 'later-born' form, which we will see is derived from the soul itself.<sup>62</sup> I think the fourth level listed here is not the essential *logoi* themselves, but rather these *logoi* as they are projected, and so literally as thoughts of the essential *logoi*. We will see this below.

With this classification in front of us, the earlier parts of the passage make sense, and help us to understand fairly well how Proclus thinks of the relation between sensation and thought. Proclus began by distinguishing between *noêma* as object of thought (*nooumenon*) and *noêma* as *noêsis* itself engaged in thinking. This latter is what Socrates was referring to when he said that thoughts come to be in souls. Without explaining what he means by this *noêsis*, however, Proclus immediately states that this is what the Peripatetics are thinking of when they talk about the later-born form. In other words, the Peripatetics *mistake* what they call the later-born form for this *noêma* as act of thinking which comes to be in souls. In effect, they think the *logos* that can be derived from the first level, in Proclus' classification, can do the work of the thoughts which for Proclus are at the third level.

However, a form which is later-born in the Peripatetic sense cannot do what they think it can, which is to allow us to understand sensible reality. Instead, we need a *logos* derived not from the objects of sensation but from the soul itself.

For from where is man able to do this [following], I mean, 'to collect into one by means of reasoning what proceeds from many sensations,'<sup>63</sup> and to posit prior to the things which are visible (*tôn phainomenôn*) and which are separate from each other the one, identical, and invisible form (*eidos*), whereas so far as we know none of the other mortal animals con-

62 For a good discussion of this passage, see C. Steel (1997) 300-301. However, although Steel distinguishes clearly between the later-born form as posterior to the many and the *logos* of the soul through which we think sensible things, he does not mention the crucial point that in this passage Proclus is appropriating the term 'later-born' for this higher sort of *logos*.

63 *Phaedrus* 249b-c. Note that the Morrow/Dillon translation has a typo, and gives this reference as 247b7-cl.

template such a common [form] (*toiouto koinon*)? For none [of them] has a rational essence (*logikên ousian*), but rather make use of sensation, desirings and [acts of] imagination. From where [else], then, do rational souls produce (*gennôsi*) these universals (*tauta ta katholou*), and run back from the sensible things (*apo tôn aisthêtôn*) to the object of opinion (*to doxaston*), than from possessing in their essence (*kat' ousian*) the *logoi* of things (*tous tôn pragmatôn logous*)?<sup>64</sup>

Proclus speaks of a *logos* through which we understand the common form of sensible things, which is related to the many sensations through reasoning (*logismos*), but which is somehow derived from the soul's essence. Were this *logos* through which we think about sensible things derived from sense-objects, then other animals besides man would be able to think. But so far as we know, they cannot.

He continues:

For [the soul] does not take (*lambanei*) [this] common [thing] (*to koinon*) from the sense-objects themselves (*par' autôn tôn aisthêtôn*). For what is taken from sense-objects is an object in imagination (*phantasma*) and not an object of opinion, and it must remain, when it is inside, such as it was when it was first grasped, so that it not [become] false or 'not being' (*kai to mê on*), but [it may] not become more complete and more noble. Nor is [this common thing] produced from anywhere else than from the soul (*apo psuchês*).<sup>65</sup>

The Peripatetics think that the common universal through which we understand sensible things is later-born, that is to say, they think it is derived from the common quality observed in many sensible things. However, Proclus points out that, while there is a such a common quality which is derived from sense-objects, this is not the sort of *logos* through which those sense-objects can be thought. Rather, what is derived in this way is a *phantasma* which must remain exactly as it was when it was grasped, if it is not to become false to its source. A *phantasma* is the retention of a sensation or group of sensations in all their particularity, so the *phantasma* of the brown dog which I saw yesterday will not allow me to have opinions about the dog which I see today, which happens to be black. Even a composite *phantasma* of the many dogs I have

64 *In Parm.*892.40-893.11.

65 *In Parm.*893.17-24.

already seen will not allow me to understand one which has qualities I have never seen before.

For the object of imagination in us of what is common (*to gar en hêmin phantasma koinon*) has its existence from our looking at the common [element] in individuals (*to kathekasta koinon*), for which reason it refers to that common element (*pheretai ep'êkeino*)... and is said to be nothing other than a predicate (*katêgorêma*), and for this same reason is able to be predicated of the many (*kai autôi toutôi einai to katêgoreisthai tôn pollôn*). And moreover [this] universal (*to katholou*) in the many is lesser than each of them; for each of the individuals (*atomôn*) is made larger (*pleonazei*) by things added to it and certain accidents (*prosthesesi gar kai sumbebêkosi tisi*).<sup>66</sup>

The common element that *phantasia* looks to is different from the common, universal *logos*. This common element is less than each individual, because each has certain accidents which it does not share with other things of the same type. For example, such a common element for dogs might be that they all have fur. But each dog has fur of a certain length, or colour, which cannot be included in this sort of common idea.

Therefore, according to Proclus, this common quality derived from individuals cannot be the common *logos* through which I understand the sensory object, because this *logos* has to be comprehensive of all that this object is. It is at this point that Proclus uses the term 'later-born' to refer to the third level of his classification.

But the later-born is comprehensive (*perilêptikon*) of each of the many; for which reason it is predicated of each of them, and the individual as a whole is in this universal (*kai holon en toutôi tôi katholou to kathekaston*).<sup>67</sup> For this common thing [the later-born] is not predicated solely of what is common there [i.e. in the individuals], but of the whole underlying (*hupokeimenou*) [individual].<sup>68</sup>

The *logos* which is comprehensive of each individual is common in a different way than something simply abstracted from the many. It is a principle of the many, and as such is more than each is individually. It is comprehensive

66 *In Parm.* 893.36-894.7.

67 Accepting Helmig's emendation.

68 *In Parm.* 894.7-12.

of each individual because each individual is in it as a whole. In other words, when I see a dog, and understand that this individual is a dog, I have to understand that all of it is a dog. It is not as if there is some minimal common core which constitutes it as a dog, and then on top of this there are a lot of things which are not-dog. Of course, certain things can be considered essential and others accidental. But Proclus' point is that in grasping a sensible particular as a dog, I have to grasp it through an idea of dog that includes *all* of what the particular is. Otherwise, my thought would not be comprehensive (*perilêptikon*) of it, and anything that was not present in every dog would fall outside of my comprehension.

However, what this means is that the universal through which I grasp the sensory object, which Proclus has just called 'later-born', cannot born from sense-objects. He mentions very briefly two possibilities, which correspond roughly to the two possibilities in the Euclid commentary. Either this comprehensive universal is derived from the common element in sensible things, a sort of abstraction, or it is derived from the totality of sensible things themselves, a sort of collection. The problems with these two methods are slightly different than in the Euclid commentary, however. He says, "For if it is from the many themselves, where are we to see the infinity of men, to all of whom we apply the same predicate? But if it is from the common quality in the many, how can it be more comprehensive than its own cause?"<sup>69</sup> Whereas in the Euclid commentary, abstraction cannot produce a mathematical object because there is nothing that stable or precise in sensible objects, here abstraction produces a universal which is not comprehensive of the object in its infinite particularity. And whereas in the Euclid commentary, collection cannot yield the premises of universal demonstrations, here collection by means of sensory experience of every characteristic to be met with in a certain sort of sensible object is simply impossible. Where are we to see this infinity of men? Therefore, although he continues to call this comprehensive form 'later-born', it cannot be derived from sense-objects.

It must therefore have taken its origin from somewhere else, and receive from something else this power of comprehending each form (*eidous*). Of this source, indeed, it is an image (*eikôn*), coming into existence contrary to what one would expect (*para doxan hupostan*), through recollection (*kata anamnêsin*) of the interior cause which has been stirred up (*tês*

---

69 *In Parm.* 894.14-19.

*endon anakinoumenês aitias*), based on the [sensory] appearances (*ek tôn phainomenôn*).<sup>70</sup>

So what is the character of this source? And what does Proclus mean by recollection of the interior cause? And how should we understand the relation of this universal to sensory appearances, if it is not derived from them in the way the Peripatetics think? He says that, “there must exist prior to the later-born the essential *logoi* (*tous ousiôdeis logous*), which are always projected (*probeblêmenous*) and active (*drastêrious*) in divine souls and in the classes of being superior to us, and which in us are sometimes covered over (*epikaluptomenous*), and are sometimes active (*energountas*).”<sup>71</sup> The idea of projection (*probolê*) of the soul’s essential *logoi* is the key, as we will see.

Proclus continues in this passage with a discussion of the term *noêma*, thought. Remember that the context of this whole discussion is Socrates’ suggestion that forms are *noêmata*, in the sense of the acts of thinking. This is most true, he says, for the paternal intellect, for whom there is no distinction between thinking and being: “let us say then that the true form (*to hôs alêthôs eidos*) is a thought (*noêma*) but first in the sense of the thinking activity of the true intellect (*hôs noêsis tou alêthous nou*) and of the paternal [intellect] itself, in which beings are acts of thinking and acts of thinking are beings (*ta onta noêseis eisi kai hai noêseis ta onta*).”<sup>72</sup> Although of a lower order, intellectual beings (*noeraï ousiai*) which come after the paternal intellect are also such that each idea (*idea*) in them is a thought. There begins to be a distinction in them between the *noêma* as the act of thinking (*noêsis*) and the object of thought (*noêton*), but these are generally co-extensive. It is only in souls that we find a great distinction between *noêma* and *noêton*.

After all the intellectual beings, in the souls which are always thinking (*en tais aei noousais psuchais*) there are thoughts (*noêmata*) and objects of thought (*noêta*) distinct from each other, such that one is thinking, and the other are thought (*hôs ta men noein, ta de noeisthai*). The thinking activities (*noêseôn*) move from object to object (*metabatikôn*), while the

70 *In Parm.*894.19-23. Helmig (2008, 45) suggests that *para doxan* is a corruption of *peri doxan*, in which case the phrase should be translated as “coming into existence on the level of opinion.” I am not completely convinced by his argument, but in either case Proclus’ point is the same.

71 *In Parm.*894.34-39.

72 *In Parm.*895.3-7.



essential *logoi* (*ousiôdôn logôn*) in them remain always the same (*aei tôn autôn menontôn*).

The souls he speaks of here are of a higher order than our own souls, which Proclus calls “partial souls” (*merikai psuchai*). These higher souls are always thinking, while we sometimes think and sometimes do not.<sup>73</sup> Each type of soul, however, has as its essence a fullness (*plêrôma*) of *logoi*, which are its participation in the forms in *nous*. In this passage, Proclus makes it clear that these essential *logoi* in souls have the relative status of object of thought, *noêta*, rather than thoughts in the sense of thinking activities, *noêmata* or *noêseis*. In fact, the thinking activities in soul are what Proclus calls projections (*probolai*) of these essential *logoi*. They are unfoldings or developments of them, and so in one sense have the essential *logoi* as their object, and in another sense are the development into multiplicity of the essential *logoi* themselves.<sup>74</sup>

So when Proclus continues, saying that thoughts (*noêmata*) in the partial soul are of two types, he means there are two thinking activities in partial souls, in addition to the essential *logoi* which are the soul’s intelligible objects (*noêta*): “in partial souls thoughts (*noêmata*) are of two types: the first are about the essential *logoi* (*ta men gar esti tôn ousiôdôn logôn*), while the second are of what is brought together into one by means of reasoning out of many sensations (*ta de tôn ek pollôn ontôn aisthêsôn eis hen logismôi sunairoumenôn*).”<sup>75</sup> Proclus discusses the second type first, but we will look at the higher type first. He says,

when we say that the projections of the essential *logoi* (*tas de tôn ousiôdôn logôn probolas*) are thoughts (*noêmata*), according to which we know in what manner the soul is the fullness of all the forms (*pantôn plêrôma esti tôn eidôn*), [we] must use the term ‘thoughts’ in a different manner, and not as what comes to be in the soul through the projection from many sensations (*dia tês tôn pollôn aisthêtôn probolês*). For those thoughts [the projections of the essential *logoi*] are of things which are established [in us] (*huphestôtôn*) and which are always in us and which are images of the real beings themselves (*auta ta ontôs onta eneikonizomenôn*). And whenever we should return to these [real beings], then we become filled (*plêreis*) with thoughts in the true sense (*tôn ontôs noêmatôn*), which do

73 *El.Th.* prop.184.

74 See D.G. MacIsaac (2001).

75 *In Parm.* 895.32–36.



not 'come to be in', but which are projected (*proballomenôn*) from things which we did not know we possess.<sup>76</sup>

This sort of thinking is the soul's self-reversion, its own native thinking activity by which it takes its own essence as its intelligible object. As such, this projection of the soul's essential *logoi* has no reference to sensation. Rather, its aim is to lead the soul away from the lower, and back to itself, and ultimately to the intelligible and henadic source of its own essence.

But it is not this higher sort which Socrates had in mind when he suggested that each form is a thought.

the second are of what is brought together into one by means of reasoning out of many sensations (*ta de tôn ek pollôn ontôn aisthêseôn eis hen logismôi sunairoumenôn*). But it is on account of these that Socrates says [they] "come to be in the soul" (*eggignesthai têi psuchêi*); for it is clear that what 'comes to be in' (*to eggignomenon*) is not in [the soul] essentially (*ouk enesti kat'ousian*). This is the last echo of the primal thinking activity (*tês prôtês noêseôs*), insofar as it is both a universal (*katholou*) and has its existence in a thinking soul (*noousêi psuchêi*).

This second type of *noêma* is related to sensation, but is not derived from sensation. The formula "brought together into one by means of reasoning out of many sensations" echos the formula from the *Phaedrus* (249b-c) which Proclus quoted earlier "to collect into one by means of reasoning what proceeds from many sensations."<sup>77</sup> At that point, Proclus stated that rational souls could only have such a unified *logos* of the sensible if they already possessed in their essence the *logoi* of all things. This *noêma* comes to be in souls, and so is distinct from the higher type which does not 'come to be', but is a projection of what always exists in us. If it is not derived from sensation, then the only source for this lower thought is the soul itself. That this is the case, and that Proclus is referring to the third of the four levels which we saw earlier,<sup>78</sup> and that he does indeed refer to this third level as later-born, is shown by the following passage:

<sup>76</sup> *In Parm.* 896.1-12.

<sup>77</sup> Compare *ta de tôn ek pollôn ontôn aisthêseôn eis hen logismôi sunairoumenôn* here and *Phaedrus* 249b-c: *to ek pollôn ion aisthêseôn eis hen logismôi sunageirein*, quoted at *In Parm.* 892.42-893.1. It is interesting to note that Proclus replaces the *Phaedrus* text's *sunairoumenon* with *sunageirein* when he quotes it, but gives *sunairoumenôn* as the final word of his restatement of it here.

<sup>78</sup> But which Proclus himself will only explain a few pages after the present passage.

So we must, as I have said, ascend from the *logoi* in nature (*apo tôn phusikôn logôn*) to those in soul (*epi tous psuchikous*), not only to those which are later-born (*ou tous husterogeneis monon*), but also to the essential [*logoi*] (*alla kai tous ousiôdeis*). For the later-born are images of these (*kai gar hoi husterogeneis toutôn eisin eikones*), not born from the many sense-objects (*ouk apo tôn pollôn aisthêtôn techthentes*).<sup>79</sup>

This is the crucial passage. He omits the first level, the common element in sensible things, which yields what is truly later-born, as it can only yield a *phantasma* that is unable to comprehend the sensible object as a whole. He begins from the *logos* in nature, which is productive of the sensible object, and so is comprehensive of its multiplicity because it is its cause. This *logos* in nature is the second of the four levels operative in the discussion. Above the form in nature he speaks of two sorts of *logoi* in soul, which correspond to the third and fourth levels, namely the later-born forms and the essential *logoi*.<sup>80</sup> The later-born *logoi* are images of the essential *logoi*, and they are not 'born' from the many sense-objects. Earlier he said that the comprehensive form through which we think sensible objects must have taken its origin from a source of which it is an image (*eidôn*), and must come into existence through recollection of the interior cause.<sup>81</sup> Therefore the source from which is born this third level of forms must be the essential *logoi* themselves.

We can see that Proclus is appropriating the Peripatetic term 'later-born' in order to make sense of the Platonic passage in which Socrates says that thoughts come to be in souls. However, while he concedes to the Peripatetics the existence of a later-born form abstracted from the many, he also dismisses this as unimportant. The more important 'later-born' form is born from a different source, namely the soul's own essential *logoi*. Moreover, because both of these sorts of forms are later born, though in different senses, the Peripatetics are led astray by thinking that the lower sort can allow us to know particulars in a way that only the higher sort can.

This shift of the meaning of 'later-born' from 'derived from the lower' to 'derived from the higher' can be seen in an earlier passage where Proclus compares the forms in Soul and the forms in Matter. If the forms in Soul were

79 *In Parm.* 896.22-27.

80 Note that by essential *logoi* here he probably means both the *logoi* themselves as well as their projections. Earlier in the discussion, before he distinguished between the different levels of thinking, he used a simple distinction between later-born forms and essential *logoi*. This passage is probably a verbal echo of the earlier terms of the discussion.

81 *In Parm.* 894.19-23.

abstracted from sense-objects in the way the Peripatetics thought, then Soul would be of less worth than Matter. This is impossible, however, because in fact the forms in Matter are themselves derived from the forms in Soul.

For this latter [the form in Matter] is exactly [the sort of thing] that we mean by 'later-born' (*touto men gar auto touto ho kai legetai husterogenes*), while the former [the form in Soul] is eternal; the latter is present in the many (*epi tois pollois*),<sup>82</sup> while the former holds the many together; and the latter is the offspring of the former.<sup>83</sup>

In comparison with those in Soul, the forms in Matter can be called 'later-born', because they are derived from those in Soul.

I think what this means, although Proclus does not say it clearly, is that the *logos* through which the soul grasps sensible particulars is also projected from the soul's essential *logoi*. It is a lower projection, and can be said to 'come to be in' souls because of the object towards which it is directed. The higher projections truly have as their object the essential *logoi*, in the sense that a soul engaged in contemplation of its own essence seeks to comprehend objects which are always already there. The lower projections, on the other hand, are *logoi* which, although derived from and images of the higher *logoi*, have as their objects things which themselves come to be present to the soul and then go away. So these *logoi* as the means of a unified sensible experience have changeable objects, and so themselves 'come to be in souls'.

That Proclus thinks this sort of later-born *logoi* is also projected may be gathered from two pieces of evidence. In the passage I quoted above, he contrasted the projections of the soul's essential *logoi* with what "what comes to be in the soul through the projection from many sensations (*dia tês tôn pollôn aisthêtôn probolês*)."<sup>84</sup> So he is calling the later-born form a projection (*probolê*), even though it is a projection from sensations. Further, if his argument is consistent, the genitive *tôn pollôn aisthêtôn* cannot mean 'derived from', and so might simply mean 'about' or 'pertaining to'. Therefore this passage seems to call the

82 Morrow and Dillon translate *epi tois pollois* as "arises from the many particulars." While this translation is warranted from a passage like Ammonius *In Isag.* 68.25-69.3 which identifies the *husterogenes* as *epi tois pollois*, it is difficult to see how the form in matter could be so derived. If I am right in thinking that Proclus here is referring to the form in matter, then a more conventional translation of *epi* as 'upon' or 'present in' is better. See C. Helmig (2008) 33-34.

83 *In Parm.* 893.36-39.

84 *In Parm.* 896.5-6.

later-born *logos* a projection which is about, or which arises on the occasion of many sensations.

Another piece of evidence that the later-born *logoi* are projected from the soul is the statement which follows immediately after “for the later-born are images of [the essential *logoi*], not born from the many sense-objects.” He continues, “for it is not always the case that what is common is derived from the many; for in the case of evil things we do not posit universal *logoi*, and in the case of unique things we do not decline to conceive of a common property because of their uniqueness.”<sup>85</sup> In this passage I think Proclus is dealing with an unstated objection. The idea of a one prior to a many is the backbone of Neoplatonic metaphysics, but in most cases the one exists before the many which it comprehends. It might be objected that a later-born universal, because it comes to be, is always derived from the many that it comprehends. Proclus responds that this is not always the case, and he gives the case of what happens when we think of evil things and of unique things. In the case of evil things there is a multiplicity, but we don’t posit a comprehensive universal of them at all, and in the case of unique things we think universally about something that isn’t even a multiplicity.<sup>86</sup> These two cases argue in favour of the plausibility of a later-born *logos* that is comprehensive of lower particulars, but not derived from them. He then concludes by saying, “so it is from within, and from our *ousia* that the projections of the forms come to be (*hai probolai gignontai tôn eidôn*), and not from the sense-objects (*kai ouk apo tôn aisthêtôn*).”<sup>87</sup> If his point about evil things and unique things was meant to illustrate his previous point that later-born *logoi* can be drawn from a source other than sense-objects, then this conclusion applies just as much to the projection of later-born forms through which we think sensible things as it does to the projections of the soul’s essential *logoi*.

Therefore, in this passage in the *Parmenides* commentary Proclus puts forward the position that the most the senses can yield is a *phantasma*. This *phantasma*, while adequate to the original sensation, does not allow the soul to have any universal grasp of the sensible world. When the soul experiences a sensible object as coming under a universal, as a dog or a tree, for example, this is because it is projecting the *logos* which is comprehensive (*perilêptikon*) of that object. This *logos* is an image of the *logos* in the soul’s own essence, and differs from the soul’s higher projections which are more truly thoughts, because while they direct the soul back towards its own essence these lower

85 *In Parm.*896.27-31.

86 He probably has in mind here something like the Sun or the Moon.

87 *In Parm.*896.31-33.

projections come to be in the soul in relation to its changeable sensory experience. This lower *logos* is projected on the occasion of sensory experience, although it likely can be projected in the absence of the sense object, as when I think about dogs when there is not one in sight, for example. Finally, this *logos* is *perilêptikos*, it allows me to think the sensible particular because the *logoi* in nature are themselves images of the *logoi* in Soul as a whole.

This passage from the *Parmenides* commentary is the most important source for our analysis of the relation between thinking and sensation in Proclus. But there are a few important discussions in Proclus' other works, which we will examine briefly. There are two relevant passages in the *Timaeus* commentary: 1) a discussion of the four types of sensation, in the context of the sort of sensation which belongs to the Cosmos as a whole;<sup>88</sup> and 2) a long discussion of the relation between sensation, imagination, opinion, and discursive reason, in the context of Plato's statement that becoming is grasped by opinion with sensation (*doxêi met' aisthêsêôs*).<sup>89</sup> In both of these passages, we find an important role for opinion (*doxa*) between sensation and discursive reason (*dianoia*). The role which it plays seems to be what we saw in the *Parmenides* commentary was the lower sort of psychic *noêma*, because it seems to possess the universals through which we think sensible things.

In the first passage, Proclus is speaking of the sort of sensation which the Cosmos has: "For if opinion is a sort of rational sensation (*hê doxa logikê tis estin aisthêsis*), the life which comes from opinion will be for the body the cause of sensation."<sup>90</sup> Even though he is speaking of the Cosmos, the relation between sensation and opinion reminds us of the *Parmenides* commentary passage where Proclus states that rational souls can "run back from the sensible things to the object of opinion" because they possess "in their essence the *logoi* of all things."<sup>91</sup> Here, opinion is some sort of cause of sensation, and itself a sort of rational sensation. For the Cosmos, opinion is a sort of rational sensation, because the Cosmos doesn't actually have sense-organs which are affected by bodily passions. But that Proclus can still say there is a sort of sensation even in the absence of organs, means that the lower sorts of sensation must also be closely tied to opinion.

His classification of the sorts of sensation here is as follows:

88 *In Tim.*11.83-85.

89 *In Tim.*1.248-255.

90 *In Tim.*11.83.7-9.

91 *In Parm.*893.9-11.

[1] Now I say that the first and most authoritative sort of sensation, which imitates intellect (*noun*)... is a comprehension of its own sense-object in itself (*to heautês aisthêton en heautêi pereilêphen*), which does not pass from one thing to another. For that [sort of transition] immediately belongs to [a sensation] which is divided. Nor does it proceed towards the outside (*oute eis to exô proiousa*), for then it would be imperfect (*touto gar ateles*). Instead it is a [sort of sensation] which has the whole sensible object in itself, and is rather like a sort of self-perception (*sunaisthêsis*). [2] Second, after this, comes the [sort of sensation] which does proceed [towards the outside], but which grasps the whole object of knowledge (*gnôston*) with a perfect activity which is always in every way the same, and which is free of passivity (*kathareuouosa pathous*) and of all the impotence (*adunamias*) which [belongs to] divided, material [sense] organs. [3] Third is the [sort of sensation] which is affected by things that are outside and which is a mixture of affection and knowledge (*summigês apo te peiseôs kai gnôseôs*), which begins from the passions, but ends in knowledge (*archomenê men apo tou pathous, teleutôsa de eis tên gnôsin*). [4] Last is the [sort of] sensation, in which the most murky sort of knowledge (*gnôsis*) is present, and which is for the most part passion (*pathos*) and is close to physical affection (*phusikês sumpatheias*), and which does not know the forms of sense-objects (*ta eidê tôn aisthêtôn*), such as make [something] hot or cold, but rather only whether what is felt (*to pros- peson*) is pleasant or painful. Timaeus himself will teach us later that the sensation which plants have is like this, an apprehension only of the pleasant and the painful, coming from sense-objects.<sup>92</sup>

He assigns these sorts of sensation to the different levels of being in a subsequent passage:

[1] The Cosmos has the first sort of sensation, unchanging, unified with its object of knowledge, wholly complete, established in actuality. [2] The Whole beings (*ta hola zôia*),<sup>93</sup> which are pure of becoming received the second sort (*eidos*) of sensation. Because [they are] parts of the All, their sensation goes out from them towards the Whole. For there is something outside of them. For this reason they transcend becoming, and comprehend the object of sense only in a impassive and active manner (*apathôs*

92 In *Tim.* 11.83.16-84.5. For a different reading of this passage, see P. Lautner (2006) 117-135.

93 Festugière notes that *ta hola zôia* are the stars.

*kai energêtikôs*). [3] The partial lives (*merikai zôai*),<sup>94</sup> which partake of becoming, and make use of their luminous vehicles (*augoeidesin ochêmasi*) as [sense] organs, have a [sort of] sensation which is mixed of passion and knowledge (*pathous kai gnôseôs*). [4] And there are certain last types of living things, such as plants, which participate in a trace of life and of sensation, [but] not of all [sorts of sensation], but the sort they do participate they possess in a passive manner.<sup>95</sup>

The mention of the partial soul's vehicle (*ochêma*) makes Festugière point out that this passage must refer to these souls in their discarnate state.<sup>96</sup> Whether or not this is the case, he states both here and in the four-fold classification above that the third type of sensation is a mixture of passivity and knowing. This is consistent with our interpretation of the *Parmenides* text, so that, upon the occasion of the passive affection in the sense-organ, the soul puts forward its own *logoi*, through which it knows the sense-object. It is reasonable, then to say that in partial souls, such as we are, our sensation is "a mixture of affection and knowledge, which begins from the passions, but ends in knowledge."

This relation between the passion and the knowing in sensation is stated again in our second passage from the *Timaeus* commentary. It is found in the context of Plato's statement that becoming is grasped by opinion with sensation (*doxêi met' aisthêseôs*).<sup>97</sup> Proclus states that sensation stands between the organ of sense and opinion, in that the sense organ is completely passive, opinion is not passive at all, and "sensation participates in passivity (*tou pathous*) in some way, but it is also has a certain cognitive element (*ti . . . gnôstikon*), insofar as it is has its seat (*enidrutai*) in opinion (*tôi doxastikôi*) and is illumined by it, and becomes 'informed by reason' (*logeides*), even though in itself is it irrational (*alogos*)."<sup>98</sup> Opinion, he says, is likewise an intermediate between sensation and discursive reason (*dianoia*). Discursive reason knows the essence (*ousia*) and the cause of sensibles, sensation knows neither of these, and opinion knows their essences, but not their causes.<sup>99</sup> So sensation does not know the essence (*ousia*) or the cause of sense-objects, but it is not the passive affection of the sense-organ. In some manner sensation is illumined by opinion, which does know the essence of things, and becomes *logeides*. The fact that

94 I.e. the partial souls, which we are.

95 In *Tim.* 11.84.28-85.7.

96 He refers us to In *Tim.* 11.81.20. for this context.

97 The entire passage is In *Tim.* 1.248-255.

98 In *Tim.* 1.248.26-29.

99 In *Tim.* 1.248.10-20.



opinion knows the essences of things, but not their causes, seems to fit with the description of the later-born *logos* which comes to be in souls, from the *Parmenides* commentary. If this *logos* allows us to comprehend the sensibles, it would have to be a knowledge of their essences (*ousia*). Further, this *logos* would not know the cause of sensible things because it is not directed towards the causes in the soul's own essence.

He continues in the *Timaeus* commentary by giving a taxonomy of the series (*seira*) of knowing powers (*gnôstikai dunameis*):

the first is intellection (*noêsis*), which is above discursive reason (*logon*) and which does not move from one object to another (*ametabatos*); discursive reason (*logos*) holds the second rank, which is the intellection (*noêsis*) which belongs to our souls, and which grasps beings by moving from object to object (*metabatikôs*); opinion comes third, which is a knowledge of sense-objects (*gnôsis tôn aisthêton*) in accordance with discursive reason (*kata logon*); sensation is fourth, which is an irrational knowledge (*alogos... gnôsis*) of [sense-objects].<sup>100</sup>

This description of opinion as *kata logon* seems to indicate its derivation from discursive reason.

The relation between opinion and sensation is especially clear in a following passage:

In general each of the senses knows the affection (*to... pathos*) which comes to be in the living thing (*peri to zôion*) from the sense object (*apo tou aisthêton*). For example, if an apple is presented to the sense of sight, it knows that it is red from the affection in the eye, the sense of smell knows that it is fragrant from the affection in the nose, taste that it is sweet, and touch that it is smooth. But what is it that says that the object presented is an apple? It is not one of the particular senses, because each of them knows [only] some one of its qualities, and not the whole. It is not the common sense (*koinê aisthêsis*), because this only distinguishes the differences between affections, and does not know that the whole has a certain essence (*ousia*). It is clear, then, that there is a certain power greater than sensation, which knows the whole before what one could call the parts, and which beholds the form (*eidos*) of the [whole] partlessly, [the form] which holds together the many aspects (*pollôn toutôn*

<sup>100</sup> In *Tim.* I.248.30-249.4.



*dunameôn*). Plato called this power opinion, and because of this he called the sensible object (*to aisthêton*) an object of opinion (*doxaston*).<sup>101</sup>

It is not clear here whether Proclus thinks of the objects of the particular senses as universal or particular, and so whether opinion is necessary for any experience of the sense-world as universal. The *phantasma* which he mentioned in the *Parmenides* commentary might be sufficient to inform the soul that a given object is red, or sweet, without being a universal. What does seem clear is that the sort of universals which Theaetetus said are grasped by the soul itself, and which in that dialogue seem to allow us to experience the sense-world as more than a flux, are within the province here of opinion rather than sensation.

Opinion, because it possesses the *logoi* (or *eidê*) of sensible things,<sup>102</sup> also allows us to correct sensory illusion. Sensation tells us that the sun is a foot wide, but opinion lets us know that it is in fact larger than the earth. This notion is not derived from sensation, rather it is the thinking soul which makes use of sensation but draws its ideas from itself. Proclus states this a bit later, in discussing the soul's unity and multiplicity. He states that the soul makes judgments about things as a unity—Proclus uses the term *logos* here to refer to the soul's ability in general to grasp and judge—and when it looks at intelligibles, it is illumined by intellect, when it looks to intermediate forms it uses discursive reason, and when it looks towards lower things it uses opinion, imagination, and sensation. This gives a strong sense of the soul having a unified seat of consciousness, such that it is always itself when it acts. It uses the lower powers, but in using them informs them with its own inherent rationality.<sup>103</sup>

The idea that the soul's rational power corrects the senses out of its own *logoi* is found also in Proclus' work on Providence.

For the intellectual [life],<sup>104</sup> through its own nature, does not suffer itself to be led by the violent affections which come from sensation, for it possesses in itself the standards of judgement (*kritêria*) of the deceptive motions<sup>105</sup> which come from outside, and supplies what is lacking to the things which sensation receives, refuting what is false in them, and doing all this of itself—for it is not by means of sensation that one can make

<sup>101</sup> *In Tim.*I.249.13-27.

<sup>102</sup> *In Tim.*I.248.11-12; I.251.22; I.252.6-7.

<sup>103</sup> *In Tim.*I.255.

<sup>104</sup> I.e. the life of the intellectual part of the soul.

<sup>105</sup> Comnenos' text has *apatêlôn nikêseôn*, which is obviously corrupted from *apatêlôn kinêseôn* = *fallacium motuum* in Moerbeke's Latin.

judgements about sensation, but rather by means of the intellectual *logoi* which sensory knowledge does not receive—and one must posit [the intellectual life] as opposed in some way to sensation, as it is immaterial, separate, and self-actuating.<sup>106</sup>

This passage obviously has a much stronger sense of the dangers of a reliance on sensation than in the previous ones which we have examined.

In an obscure part of his *Commentary on the Republic of Plato*,<sup>107</sup> Proclus gives a fuller taxonomy of the soul's lower powers. His discussion occupies only half a page, and unfortunately does not give an explanation of the arrangement. It is relevant to our current discussion only in that, whereas in the *Timaeus* commentary passage referred to above, sensation is established in the doxastic part of the soul, and is illumined by it,<sup>108</sup> in the *Republic* commentary sensation is likewise related to *doxa*, as its image (*eikôn*). He states that the rational soul (*logikê psuchê*) has a sort of knowledge which tends upwards towards immaterial being and a sort which tends downwards towards becoming. These are *noêsis* and *doxa*.<sup>109</sup> The soul also has irrational powers (*alogoi dunameis*) which are images of these two, namely *phantasia* and *aisthêsis*. So both opinion and sensation tend downwards towards becoming, with the latter as an irrational image of the former. It is unfortunate that Proclus does not explain here what he means by image in this context, but he likely means something like the 'illumination' referred to in the *Timaeus* commentary.<sup>110</sup>

I have been arguing that in Proclus sensation must be supplemented by a higher power, if we are to have the experience which we do have of the sensible world. This higher power seems, at least in some texts, to be opinion.<sup>111</sup> Opinion, in its turn, seems to depend on discursive reason and to be itself a sort of lower projection of the soul's essential *logoi*. If this is the case, however, why does it not seem that I am *thinking* every time I open my eyes and look

106 Isaac Comnenos, *Peri pronoiās kai phusikēs anagkês*, 44.58–67 (p. 150 Budé), which is parallel to the Latin translation of Proclus, *De Providentia* 44.10–21. See also *In Alc.* 245.14–17. The title of this paper is taken from this passage.

107 *In Remp.* I.235.1–21. This is the final page of the 7th essay.

108 *In Tim.* I.248.26–29.

109 From other Procline texts, it seems that he is not using *noêsis* in a technical sense here, but rather as a term which refers both to the soul's *dianoia* and its *noêsis*. Cf. Proclus' discussion of the levels of *noêsis* in *In Tim.* I.243.27–248.6.

110 For a discussion of this schema, see MacIsaac (2009), and for the idea of illumination in Proclus see MacIsaac (2011).

111 Of course, opinion is also the power of the soul that Socrates turns to after sensation, in *Theaetetus*.

out at the world? It certainly cannot be the case that I have to learn arithmetic as a science in order to know which jar has more cookies in it, or that I have to be a zoologist in order to distinguish my cat from my dog. Somehow the *logoi* which opinion receives from the discursive reason can be possessed in a manner which could be described as unconscious. Although he is not speaking about sensation, in his commentary on the *Alcibiades I*, Proclus does put forward the idea of the soul's unconscious possession of its own *logoi*.

And so, therefore, this argument (*logos*), sufficiently attended to, shows clearly that learning is recollection (*tas mathêseis anamnêseis einai*). For it is a strong proof of this opinion, that respondents draw everything which they say from themselves, so that their souls project the *logoi* from themselves (*proballousin aph' heautôn hai psuchai tous logous*) and are only in need of someone to awaken them, and are not *unwritten tablets*<sup>112</sup> which receive their impression from outside. Rather, they have always been written on, and he who writes is inside the soul. But they are not all able to know what is written, nor indeed to know at all that they have been written on, because their eye has become clouded by the forgetfulness of the world of becoming and the passions which rush into the souls like revelers, due to this forgetfulness.<sup>113</sup>

We are not always aware of our essential *logoi* because of the shock of being in the body. Proclus describes our the *logoi* which are our *ousia* as “hidden” or “concealed” in the soul (*kruphiôs*).<sup>114</sup> Though they exist as a unity before their projection, the *logoi* in our essence are not simply a potentiality, in the sense of passive potentiality. These *logoi* cannot exist as a passive potentiality for thinking, because this would contradict their nature as *logoi*, and the essence of the soul would then be a passive principle.<sup>115</sup> Our essential *logoi* are, in fact, always active. Proclus uses the metaphors of our breathing and of our heart-

112 *De An.*430a1-2.

113 *In Alc.*280.24-281.8.

114 *In Eucl.*46.1: “It possesses them all in an essential and secret manner (*echei d' oun pasas ousiôdôs kai kruphiôs*); 56.13: “but whatever is in it in a secret manner (*alla kai hosa kruphiôs estin en ekeinôi*).”

115 I agree with C. Steel (1997) 296: “By definition, *logoi* cannot be what they are (i.e. ‘reasons’), without involving some sort of cognitive (‘rational’) activity, particularly in those souls which are called *logikai* (‘rational’). Indeed, all forms without matter, be they *eidê* or *logoi*, are necessarily totally intelligible, and therefore must always be the objects of an intelligising activity.” For a discussion of the unconscious possession of *logoi* that brings out the danger that they pose for the soul, see MacIsaac (2011) 41-42.

beat to explain how our essence can be always cognitively active without our noticing it.<sup>116</sup>

because they possess the *logoi* of things, as a sort of heartbeat, they have notions (*ennoias*) of those things, but because they are conquered by the draught of oblivion they are unable make their own notions articulate and send them forth towards knowledge (*epistêmê*). Thus they carry them around as if suffocating, and scarcely drawing breath.<sup>117</sup>

And again: "We possess the *logoi* in our essence and knowledge of these *logoi* as a sort of breathing, but we do not possess them as projected and actualised."<sup>118</sup>

The context of these passages is Socrates' attempt to rescue the young Alcibiades by refuting his double ignorance, and thereby awakening his philosophical eros. However, they indicate that Proclus thinks we employ the *logoi* of things in some manner, even before we have been refuted. It is tempting to connect this cognitive heartbeat both with the lower sort of *noêma* from the *Parmenides* commentary, and from his statements about opinion from the *Timaeus* commentary. If we do this, then it is plausible that on a Procline account we employ the universals through which we think the sensible world as this sort of cognitive heartbeat or breathing. I do not have to be a zoologist in order to know that this thing in front of me is a dog, but I do have already to know in some dim sense what a dog is.

#### 4

I have examined the relation between sensation and thought in Plato and Plotinus, and at greater length in Proclus. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates argued that a soul whose highest faculty were sensation would have no unified experience of the sensible world. The implication of this argument isn't just that the soul possesses a power superior to sensation, but that somehow this superior power lends a stability and unity to our *experience* of the sensible world, as opposed to our mere *sensation* of it. In Plotinus, we saw this idea taken further. Although the sense-organs are passively affected by sensible objects, taking on the forms which originate with them, the soul itself is not a passive recipient of sensible forms. Rather, because it is the *logos* of all things, it responds to the

<sup>116</sup> See J. Trouillard (1972) 42-43.

<sup>117</sup> *In Alc.*189.6-11.

<sup>118</sup> *In Alc.*192.2-5.

passivity of the sense-organs with an activity, a self-actualisation by which it thinks the forms which it already possesses.

This idea is given more precision in Proclus, who argues against the derivation of universal *logoi* from the senses. The senses are unable to yield the means through which the sensible world becomes intelligible. The most that they seem to give is a *phantasma*, a record of the original sense-impression in all its particularity. It is because opinion possesses the *logoi* of all things, likely as a projection from the soul's essence, that we experience the sensible world as having universals in it, and objects like apples and airplanes, rather than a mere aggregate of absolutely particular impressions.<sup>119</sup> So in Proclus we have drawn together the active role of the soul, which we saw in Plotinus, with the idea which we saw in *Theaetetus* that our sensory experience on its own would lack the universals that give that experience unity and coherence.

Even more interestingly, Proclus' idea that the soul can employ its own *logoi* even though it is not completely conscious of this employment makes his theory more subtle and plausible than it otherwise would be. In a sense, it is a Platonic version of the account of sensation given by Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. On Heidegger's account, we never in fact construct complex objects (he is speaking of more than mere sensation) by a synthesis of their atomic constituents.

Rather we hear the storm whistling in the chimney, we hear the three-motored plane, we hear the Mercedes in immediate distinction from the Volkswagen. Much closer to us than all sensations are the things themselves. We hear the door shut in the house and never hear acoustical sensations or even mere sounds. In order to hear a bare sound we have to listen away from things, divert our ear from them, i.e., listen abstractly."<sup>120</sup>

---

119 J. Trouillard (1982) 135-136: "L'idée n'est un objet que métaphoriquement, en tant qu'on projette sur elle ce qu'elle illumine. Elle n'est pas thématizable, mais ce par quoi il y a indéfiniment des objets douées de tel ou tel caractère. Elle n'est ni une catégorie au sens d'Aristote ni une idée régulatrice kantienne, encore que ce second rapprochement soit plus éclairant. Elle se dévoile inadéquatement à travers une opération, un impératif, un jugement. Où saisissons-nous l'idée du juste si ce n'est dans l'inadéquation perpétuelle des actions à notre exigence de rectitude ou bien dans l'invention de conduites de moins en moins iniques? L'idée de grandeur est-elle grande? Non, répond Proclus, si on la prend pour une structure objective, au lieu de la considérer comme une puissance de dépassement."

120 M. Heidegger (1977) 156.

On Proclus' theory, the things themselves are much closer to us than the sensations, because the *logoi* through which the Soul made all material things are already present in us. Another modern parallel here is in Kant. Although for Kant the categories and the forms of outer intuition are purely formal principles, and so differ from the Platonic *logoi*, they are present at all times, as conditions of the possibility of spatial and temporal experience, and of judgement, but are seldom themselves consciously reflected upon.

So, in conclusion, in Plato and Plotinus, and most explicitly in the philosophy of Proclus, the reception of impressions by sense-organs does not depend on thought, but a unified experience of the sense-world does. For Proclus, although we travel through the world sensing it, in a more important sense we travel through the world thinking it through its paradigmatic *logoi* already present in our souls.<sup>121</sup>

### Bibliography

- Blumenthal, H.J. 1971. *Plotinus' Psychology, his doctrine of the embodied soul*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- . 1982. 'Proclus on perception'. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 29, 1-11.
- . 1989. 'Plotinus and Proclus on the criterion of truth', in P. Huby and G. Neal (eds.), *The Criterion of Truth. Essays written in honour of George Kerfeld*. Liverpool: Liverpool U.P., 257-280.
- . 1999. 'Some Neoplatonic views on perception and memory: similarities, differences and motivations', in *Traditions of Platonism, Essays in honour of John Dillon*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 319-335.
- . 1996. *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity, Interpretations of the De Anima*. Ithaca: Cornell U.P.
- Corrigan, K. 1981. 'The internal dimensions of the sensible object in the thought of Plotinus and Aristotle'. *Dionysius* 5, 98-126.
- Emilsson, E.K. 1988. *Plotinus on sense-perception: A philosophical study*. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988.
- Heidegger, M. 1977. 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in D.F. Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

<sup>121</sup> As a final note, in the next generation this active theory of sensation was taken a step further, and in the Ps. Simplician commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima* we find a theory in which even the particular senses project a *logos* from the soul upon the occasion of the passive affection in the sense-organ. See Ps. Simplicius, *In De Anima* 189.33-190.5; 192.34-193.10.

- Helmig, C. 2008. 'Proclus and Other Neoplatonists on Universals and Predication'. *Documenti e Studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 19, 31-52.
- . 2010. 'Proclus' criticism of Aristotle's theory of abstraction and concept formation in *Analytica Posteriora* 11 19', in F. de Haas, M. Leunissen, and M. Martijn (eds.) *Interpreting Aristotle's Posterior Analytics in Late Antiquity and beyond* (Philosophia Antiqua 124). Leiden/Boston: Brill, 27-54.
- Lautner, P. 2006. 'Some Clarifications on Proclus' Fourfold Division of Sense-Perception in the Timaeus Commentary', in M. Perkams und R.M. Piccione (eds.), *Proklos. Methode, Seelenlehre, Metaphysik. Akten der Konferenz in Jena am 18.-20. September 2003*. Philosophia antiqua 98. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 117-135.
- MacIsaac, D.G. 2001. *The Soul and discursive reason in the Philosophy of Proclus*. (Ph.D. Thesis, U. Notre Dame IN, 2001, unpublished).
- . 2009. 'The Soul and the Virtues in Proclus' *Commentary on the Republic of Plato*'. *Philosophie Antique* 9, 115-143.
- . 2010. 'Noësis, dialectique et mathématiques dans le *Commentaire aux Éléments d'Euclide* de Proclus', in A. Lernoùld (ed.), *Études sur le Commentaire de Proclus au premier livre des Éléments d'Euclide*. Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 125-138.
- . 2011. 'The *Nous* of the Partial Soul in Proclus' *Commentary on the First Alcibiades of Plato*'. *Dionysius* 29, 29-60.
- . 2014. 'Geometrical First Principles in Proclus' *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*'. *Phronesis* 59, 44-98.
- Steel, C. 1997. 'Breathing thought: Proclus on the innate knowledge of the soul', in J. Cleary (ed.), *The perennial tradition of neoplatonism*. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 293-309.
- Trouillard, J. 1972. *L'Un et l'âme selon Proclus*. Paris: Belles Lettres.
- . 1982. *La mystagogie de Proclus*. Paris: Belles Lettres.